For my Grandmother Knitting

There is no need they say

but the needles still move

their rhythms in the working of your hands

as easily

as if your hands

were once again those sure and skilful hands

of the fisher-girl.

You are old now

and your grasp of things is not so good

but master of your moments then

deft and swift

you slit the still-ticking quick silver fish.

Hard work it was too

of necessity.

But now they say there is no need

as the needles move

in the working of your hands

once the hands of the bride

with the hand-span waist

once the hands of the miner’s wife

who scrubbed his back

in a tin bath by the coal fire

once the hands of the mother

of six who made do and mended

scraped and slaved slapped sometimes

when necessary.

But now they say there is no need

the kids they say grandma

have too much already

more than they can wear

too many scarves and cardigans –

gran you do too much

there’s no necessity…

At your window you wave

them goodbye Sunday.

With your painful hands

big on shrunken wrists.

Swollen-jointed. Red. Arthritic. Old.

But the needles still move

their rhythms in the working of your hands

easily

as if your hands remembered

of their own accord the patter

as if your hands had forgotten

how to stop.

Liz Lochhead